

Fish-recovery costs growing, along with critics in Congress

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THE OREGONIAN

WASHINGTON —

For years, Congress turned a collective blind eye to the Northwest's fish problem as administrations and members from the region spent millions trying to clean the environment and save imperiled runs from extinction.

But those days are drawing to a close. Fish runs show little sign of rebound. And as the price of recovery approaches \$1 billion a year, environmental and taxpayer advocates are urging Congress to scrutinize how the money is spent.

"How many years can you keep spending that kind of money?" said Ralph DeGennaro, executive director of Taxpayers for Common Sense. "Doing it year after year, pretty soon you're talking about real money."

For Congress members from the Northwest, a new reality is sinking in. As the region wrestles with difficult decisions — including the possible breaching of four Snake River dams to improve fish habitat — they'll be pressed to defend how money is spent on fish.

It won't be easy, given the results.

"I don't think we can make a case that this \$1 billion is being well spent," said Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore.

Federal money accounts for about two-thirds of what is spent on Northwest fish. But it's not surprising that the U.S. contribution goes uncounted, members of Congress and Clinton administration officials said.

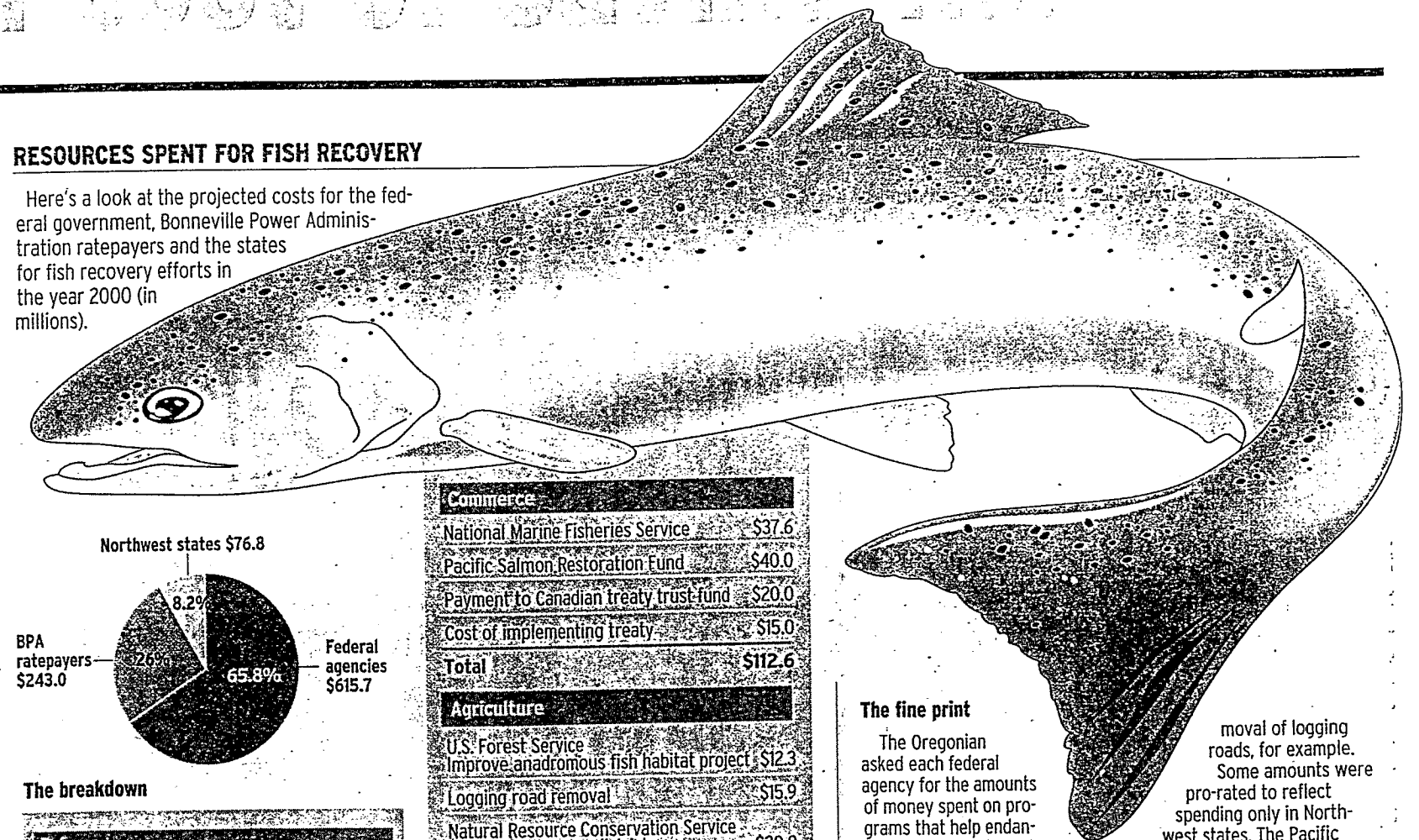
Part of the problem is the nature of bureaucracy and the agencies' overlapping missions. At least six federal agencies are working to solve the Northwest fish problem, but none has formal responsibility for coordinating that work.

The congressional process also makes it hard to keep track of fish spending, said Sen. Slade Gorton, R-Wash., a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Each house allocates money through four or more spending bills crafted largely at the subcommittee level.

"Often, the right hand doesn't know what the left is doing," Gorton said.

RESOURCES SPENT FOR FISH RECOVERY

Here's a look at the projected costs for the federal government, Bonneville Power Administration ratepayers and the states for fish recovery efforts in the year 2000 (in millions).



The breakdown

Defense	
Army Corps of Engineers	
Columbia Fish Mitigation Project	\$100.0
Fish operations and maintenance	\$6.8
Total	\$106.8
Energy	
Cost of water spilled to help fish	\$160.0
Total	\$160.0
Interior	
Bureau of Land Management	\$20.1
Bureau of Reclamation	\$34.2
Bureau of Indian Affairs	\$10.6
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	\$43.2
National Park Service	\$0.1
U.S. Geological Survey for water quality assessment	\$2.7
Total	\$110.9

Commerce	
National Marine Fisheries Service	\$37.6
Pacific Salmon Restoration Fund	\$40.0
Payment to Canadian treaty trust fund	\$20.0
Cost of implementing treaty	\$15.0
Total	\$112.6

Agriculture	
U.S. Forest Service	
Improve anadromous fish habitat project	\$12.3
Logging road removal	\$15.9
Natural Resource Conservation Service	
Improve soil, water districts	\$20.0
Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (river buffers)	\$2.0
Total	\$50.2

EPA	
Grants to states and tribes	\$64.2
Other	\$11.0
Total	\$75.2

BPA ratepayers	
Total	\$243.0

States	
Oregon	\$26.0
Washington	\$50.0
Idaho	\$0.5
Montana	\$0.3
Total	\$76.8

The fine print

The Oregonian asked each federal agency for the amounts of money spent on programs that help endangered fish runs throughout the four Northwest states — Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana.

We asked each agency for its actual spending in 1998, its expected spending in 1999 and its request for funding in 2000. Amounts for 2000, listed at left, do not reflect action by congressional appropriations committees. We added the federal resources to what the states spend and what Bonneville Power Administration ratepayers contribute. The total resources earmarked for fish protection in those three years: \$801.1 million spent in 1998; \$791.4 million planned for 1999; and \$935.5 million forecast for 2000.

Some programs included in the totals were not specifically designed for fish recovery, but they clearly help fish — the re-

moval of logging roads, for example. Some amounts were pro-rated to reflect spending only in Northwest states. The Pacific Coast Salmon Restoration Fund amount, for example, excludes spending in Alaska and California.

Amounts from Northwest states exclude federal grants and matching funds and, in some cases, include state officials' best estimates.

The Energy Department total includes the Bonneville Power Administration's lost revenue from water spilled over dams to increase stream flows. The overall total also includes BPA programs paid for by ratepayers.

The Oregonian worked with nearly two dozen government officials for a month to develop the total for 2000. It is the most accurate estimate we could make, but in the end, it remains just that — an estimate.

— Jim Barnett

Source: U.S. government agencies; states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana; the Bonneville Power Administration